

VZCZCXRO1238
RR RUEHBZ RUEHGI RUEHMA
DE RUEHBZ #0331/01 3220903
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 180903Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1618
INFO RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA 0547
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE 0065
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0072
RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY BANGUI 0042
RUEHLU/AMEMBASSY LUANDA 0034
RUEHMA/AMEMBASSY MALABO 0016
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA 0014
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0507
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0059
RHMFISS/AFRICOM
RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE 2029

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 BRAZZAVILLE 000331

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CF](#) [EFIN](#) [EAGR](#) [EINV](#) [ETRD](#)

SUBJECT: BRAZZAVILLE IN BRIEF: NOVEMBER 18, 2009

1.(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

2.(u) This is the latest in our occasional series of cables conveying developments in the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville). Today's edition addresses the IMF/World Bank in the last stages of HIPC completion point discussions, a successful privatization, the state of the opposition, and the death of longtime political leader Bernard Kolelas.
IMF/WORLD BANK MISSION POSTPONED

3.(SBU) A joint mission of the IMF/World Bank had been expected to visit Brazzaville this week to put the final touches on Congo(B)'s HIPC "completion point" eligibility, but according to the local IMF representative, the mission has been postponed, probably until early next month. The sticking point, roughly summarized, is whether Congo's crude oil marketing system meets international standards with respect to commercial practices, governance, and transparency. This will push Bank/Fund board consideration of "completion point" to January, at the earliest.
MINOCO PRIVATIZATION COMPLETED -SEABOARD OWNS IT

4.(U) On November 13, 2009, the Congolese flour mill MINOCO, located at the port of Pointe-Noire, completed the privatization process begun in 2000 with the final payment of 363,780,000 CFA (roughly USD895,000) to the GROC, representing the last annual installment of the purchase price of around USD 8 million (six billion CFA). MINOCO is now a wholly-owned subsidiary of Kansas-based Seaboard Corporation, whose president, Steve Bresky, attended the final payment ceremony along with the Ambassador and Rodolphe Adada, Minister of State for Industrial Development and Promotion of the Private Sector.

5.(U) COMMENT: MINOCO represents the only/only non-petroleum-sector U.S. investment in the Republic of Congo. The travails of MINOCO in doing business in the Congo have been the subject of frequent reporting. MINOCO has perennial difficulty accessing rail transport for its flour from the mill in Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville, faces stiff competition from importers of milled flour from Europe, endures a tight retail price control regime in the market here in which world wheat price increases do not constitute a basis for downstream price increases, and has recently learned that it apparently will have to move the mill (comprising four substantial concrete silos) away from its present very convenient location next to the dock, according to the plans drawn up to implement the port restructuring associated with the 27-year concession granted last December to the French company Bollore Group. MINOCO was hoping to receive a title deed for the mill property during the signing ceremony (for leverage in the discussion with the port/Bollore), but management was disappointed to learn at the last minute that the only thing transferred would be the shares of the previous government-owned feed mill which was the

privatized state entity.

THE OPPOSITION: TRAVEL BAN LIFTED, CHARGES AGAINST DZON REMAIN

6.(U) The travel ban on opposition party leaders overseas travel was lifted by Minister of State for Justice Aime Emmanuel Yoka on November 3rd. This decision was reached following an Oct 31st meeting with opposition leaders, including Ange Edouard Pongui, Mathias Dzon, General Ngolonduele and Guy Kinfouissa. This travel ban surprised opposition leaders attempting to travel since July; they learned of it when a couple of leaders presented themselves at the airport for the Paris flight, and it was compounded when two others found themselves barred from boarding a domestic flight to Dolisie, where they planned to organize a protest rally and meet with supporters. It was put in place following a July 15 disturbance resulting from a public meeting organized by the opposition to protest the announced results of the July 12 presidential election.

7.(SBU) In addition, formal charges were filed against opposition leader Mathias Dzon, including weapons charges, after the incident. According to State Prosecution lawyer Essamy Gatse, the charges against Dzon are still active, but he is free to leave the country. Mr. Gatse stated that charges will be dropped by the end of the year if there is no more substantive evidence is discovered that would implicate him in the case.

DZON DENIES INVOLVEMENT IN PARIS BEAC SCANDAL

8.(U) Congolese opposition party member Mathias Dzon, who was Congo's National Director at the Bank of Central African States (BEAC) until his retirement at the end of December, 2008, was

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reported by the magazine Jeune Afrique to be implicated in an Audit Committee Investigation Report of the Bank of Central African States (BEAC). Jeune Afrique reported that Mathias Dzon benefitted from 58 million CFA (roughly \$128,889) traceable to fraudulent activity in BEAC's Paris Office. Two other previous Congolese ministers were included in the report, Pacifique Issoibeka and Rigobert Andily, both prior Ministers of Finance. Mathias Dzon has denied any involvement in the scandal, on his part or that of a daughter also mentioned in the article, and has threatened to sue BEAC for false claims.

BERNARD KOLELAS DIES IN PARIS (A not-so-brief item)

9.(U) Veteran Congolese political Bernard Kolelas died November 13 in Paris. He was 76. We offer the following by way of obituary:

10.(U) Bernard Kolelas was a player in the Congolese political arena since the 1960s, holding various positions including Prime Minister, Mayor of Brazzaville, and Secretary of Foreign Affairs, but throughout his political career his ambition to ascend to the highest office in the land has always fallen short. In the early years after independence, Kolelas was a protege of Fulbert Youlou. After Youlou's fall, Kolelas went into opposition, speaking out against Massamba-Debat's plan to put in place a socialist regime in Congo. This earned him criminal charges and exile in Kinshasa, where he helped President Youlou depart for Spain in 1965.

11.(U) Kolelas returned to Brazzaville during the presidency of Marien Ngouabi and opposed Ngouabi's proclamation of the Popular Republic of Congo as a Communist regime. He was accused of plotting against the regime and was arrested several times during Ngouabi's presidency.

12.(U) Kolelas experienced similar treatment by successors of Marien Ngouabi, including presidents Jacques Joachim Yhombi-Opango and Denis Sassou Nguesso. President Sassou granted Kolelas relative freedom during his first 12 years in power.

13.(U) At the beginning of the 1990's, with the convening of the National Conference, Kolelas founded the MCDDI, one of the first political parties. Kolelas was not shy in crediting himself with bringing democracy in the Republic of Congo, claiming that the National Conference of 1991 was his personal achievement. The era of the early 1990s was the symbolic dawn of the

democratic process in the Congo and heralded a shift in the political process. Kolelas was at the forefront with the establishment of Le Movement Congolaise pour le Democratie et Developpement Integral (MCDDI). One of the outcomes of the National Conference was an agreement to hold national elections. During the run-up to those first (and arguably only) democratic elections in Congo in 1992, Kolelas enjoyed huge support and was regarded as a front-runner among the three main candidates. In the event, he came in second, behind Lissouba and ahead of Sassou-Nguesso. A behind-the-scenes power sharing agreement between Lissouba's UPADS and Sassou's PCT parties saw Kolelas' ambitions for high office once again dashed when Lissouba took office as President. The democratic honeymoon was short-lived as Lissouba turned his back on whatever purported agreement was made with Sassou (who came in third in the election), with a public renunciation of the alleged agreement as notes on a "sheet of paper." That episode created a political divide that would soon thrust the country into civil war.

THE BIRTH OF THE NINJAS

14.(U) Kolelas became the Mayor of Brazzaville, a consolation of sorts after his disappointment in the election. The mayoral honeymoon was short-lived, as in 1993 the contending parties went to war. Kolelas retreated to his main base of support in the Pool, Kinkala and Goma Tse Tse (which he represented in the National Assembly at the time of his death), prompted by an incident in which the Lissouba-controlled Army killed several protestors in a peaceful march of opposition supporters. Adding further insult, Lissouba's base of civilian supporters quickly moved to benefit from the shift in administration and took the streets in Brazzaville, physically and forcibly displacing Kolelas faithful from certain neighborhoods of Brazzaville. The new Lissouba administration failed to take any action. Retaliatory action by Kolelas supporters led to an escalation of intra-party ethnic atrocities and a more widespread civil conflict separated along tribal lines in the south, pitting predominantly Kongo and Lari tribes, behind Kolelas, and supporters of the so-called "Nibolek," (groups from Niyari, Bouenza, and Lekoumou departments in the south), as well as the Vili and Mbembe tribes, behind Lissouba.

15.(U) Towards the end of the civil war, Kolelas' newly formed militia, the Ninjas, were alleged to have received aid from

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Sassou's own militia, the Cobras, joining forces against a common enemy, Lissouba. Even after the civil war was brought to an end, both entities employed covert efforts geared toward destabilizing the Lissouba government. Not to be outdone, Lissouba formed a protective circle of his own tribe with the Cocoyes. Though the present-day "Ninjas," who are responsible for increasing insecurity in the Pool region in recent weeks, bear the same name as Kolelas' militia, they are neither associated with, nor loyal to, what remains of his political party.

REVERSED ALLIANCES

16.(U) Fast-forward to the spring of 1997 at the height of campaigns for the second post-national conference presidential election. Sassou had returned from Paris to spearhead a return to the Presidency. A controversial killing of an army official in Makoua by Sassou's bodyguards, while on the campaign trail in the north, led to an eventual showdown in Brazzaville when Lissouba gave orders to arrest Sassou for obstruction of justice as he return to the capital to continue his campaign run. Sassou's protective cadre of Cobras proved to be formidable and thus ensued a prolonged conflict between the Cobras and government forces with Brazzaville at the centre, and thus the second civil war in the Congo. As the war dragged on from June into the summer, with significant casualties on both sides, and the government forces reeling, Lissouba made a play for Kolelas' support. In what many observers viewed as an alliance of the North vs. the South, Kolelas lent the support of his Ninjas, to his previously sworn enemy Lissouba, in exchange for an appointment to a specially created post of the Prime Minister. This was viewed as a most surprising development at the time as Kolelas had remained on the sidelines during the face-off between Sassou and Lissouba, offering to serve in the capacity of mediator between the warring entities. The alliance proved

ill-fated as Sassou gained the support of Angolan forces and assumed power in October 1997. Kolelas went into exile shortly thereafter and was eventually tried in absentia on war crimes charges under the new Sassou administration.

ENCORE UNE FOIS

17.(U) Kolelas was granted amnesty by President Sassou in 2005. Upon his return, Kolelas engaged his political party, MCDDI, to a peace and reconciliation process with the Sassou government. In 2009, Kolelas signed an agreement to support Sassou during this summer's presidential elections. Out of this agreement, two ministerial appointments have been accorded to Guy Parfait Kolelas (the biological son of Bernard Kolelas) , Minister of Civil Service and State Reform and to Hello Mantson Mampouya (Kolelas' son-in-law), Minister of Fishing and Aquaculture. Guy Parfait was one of the co-managers of Sassou's re-election campaign earlier this year.

18.(U) Kolelas' remains will be repatriated to Brazzaville at the end of the week, and we expect a tumultuous reception and public funeral to follow. Sassou-Nguesso issued a statement of condolences, saying that Kolelas "had the worthiness and the merit to have made the choice of reason, to put himself sincerely and irreversibly on the side of peace, unity, and reconciliation in our shared house, the Congo.

EASTHAM